

House Bill 144  
March 15, 2011  
Presented by Dave Risley  
Senate Fish and Game Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Dave Risley, Fish and Wildlife Division Administrator with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here to provide information for House Bill 144.

HB144 directs that FWP establish hunting season quotas for mountain lions and wolves that will prevent populations of deer, elk, and antelope from decreasing beyond sustainable levels pursuant to 87-1-323. FWP interprets this to mean that these big game populations should be managed at or above objective. In contrast, 87-1-323 directs FWP to manage big game populations at or below population objectives; any language in HB144 needs to be consistent in that regard.

Mountain lions are managed as valued big game species, and our intention is to manage wolves similarly. Both have constituencies, including avid hunters, who are engaged with and concerned about their status and management.

FWP strives to manage big game populations at objective per 87-1-323, and already considers the impacts of predation on big game populations as one of the key factors considered when developing harvest recommendations for mountain lions and wolves. Mountain lion populations and their harvest have been managed to provide for sustainable populations that are balanced against the status of big game populations, where appropriate. Harvest rates on the adult female segment of both lion and bear populations is the key component in managing those populations. Because neither big game nor predator populations are stable, harvest recommendations are adjusted annually based on a variety of inputs to meet these objectives. Management actions to reduce livestock conflicts and deal aggressively with human safety issues are also important variables that are considered per 87-1-217. The intent of FWP for a wolf hunting season in 2010 had been to reduce wolf numbers while maintaining a biologically recovered and genetically connected population. The option for that season was eliminated with the relisting of wolves under the ESA.